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RR RUEHPW
DE RUEHBUL #0250 0341002
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FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7120
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS KABUL 000250

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A, EUR/RPM
STATE PASS TO AID FOR ASIA/SCAA
NSC FOR WOOD
OSD FOR WILKES
CG CJTF-101 POLAD

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Balkh Politicians Mix Politics into Memorial Service

Summary

¶1. (U) At a memorial service in a remote district of Samangan province for a slain member of parliament, Balkh Governor Mohammed Atta Noor and Balkh Deputy Governor Abdo Wahdat engaged in some pre-campaign rhetoric. Atta encouraged the crowd of 500 who had gathered to listen to memorial speeches to vote for the "right" candidate in the upcoming presidential election, although he did not offer any hints. Wahdat, perhaps expecting Atta to slip in a political message, had one of his own, which he used to criticize the Karzai government. Both Atta and Wahdat, who are from different political parties, provided glimpses into their own thinking about the presidential race.

Memorial Ceremony with Political Overtones

2.(U) Balkh Governor Atta (Tajik, Jamiat party) and Balkh Deputy Governor Abdo Wahdat (Hazara, Wahdat party) traveled to Rui do Ab district, Samangan province on January 31, to participate in a memorial service marking the one-year anniversary of the death of Mallawi Mohammed Islam Mohameddi, an ethnic Sunni Hazara and Jamiat Party-backed Member of Parliament from Rui do Ab district, who was assassinated in Kabul last year. Both men used the occasion - portions of which were broadcast on Balkh TV - to do some politicking among Rui do Ab residents, who are a mix of Sunni and Shia Hazaras.

Atta to Crowd: Choose the Right Candidate

¶3. (U) After praising Mohameddi's accomplishments fighting the Soviets and later, the Taliban, Atta told his audience that they "have the opportunity to shape their destiny by selecting the right candidate at the time of elections, someone who has served better than others." He didn't elaborate further on this point, nor did he mention anyone by name.

Deputy Governor Criticizes Karzai on Television

¶4. (U) Deputy Governor Wahdat was less obtuse in his remarks. "We, the people of Samangan, are not happy that the central government has ignored us," the deputy governor said. "Samangan people are underrepresented within the central government structure, even within the Samangan provincial government," he added, provocatively. (Note: Deputy Governor Wahdat is from Balkh province - not from Samangan.) Balkh TV broadcast the deputy governor's remarks.

Balkh PC Member: Atta's Visit to Samangan Political

15. (U) Balkh provincial council member Sardar Saidi, who represents the Hazara-based Wahdat Party (led by MP Mohaqgeq) in the north, was unaware of the deputy governor's trip to Rui do Ab. Upon hearing of the latter's comments, he said he was glad that Deputy Governor Wahdat used the occasion to criticize Karzai. Saidi also noted that Wahdat Party has yet to endorse a candidate. He believes that Atta's motives for going to Rui do Ab were clearly political, and pointed out that Atta did not bother to attend mourning ceremonies for Mohameddi in Rui do Ab a year ago. Rui do Ab is one of the most remote districts in Samangan - easily a 7 hour-long drive from the provincial capital, Aybak.

Comment

16. (SBU) Governor Atta is laying the groundwork to sway Sunni Hazaras to vote for the candidate the Jamiat Party - with his blessing - eventually endorses. Atta told PRTOff only a few days before making the Rui do Ab trip that the candidate he supports must be (a) highly respected and (b) have the backing of the international community. Deputy Governor Wahdat seemingly anticipated that Atta would use the occasion in Rui do Ab to slip a political message into his remarks, which would explain why Wahdat was quick to seize the opportunity to criticize Karzai's government. At the very least, the deputy governor's comments and those of Wahdat party representative Saidi make it clear where they stand with respect to any talk of Wahdat party support for Karzai's reelection bid.

WOOD